

Science Fair gives McMurray students a chance to shine

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McMurray Middle School was a hotbed of methodical inquiry on Friday, March 28, as students enthusiastically showed off their all-school science fair projects to parents, siblings, grandparents and friends during a community showcase.

The annual science fair — which had been on hiatus for several years until 2024, when it was revived by McMurray science teachers Charlie Ralston, Erin Blaser and Amy Beth Holmes — gave every student in the school a chance to shine.

Holmes said she and her fellow teachers hope their revitalized science fair will continue for many years to come — describing it as an empowering educational experience too valuable to lose.

“When we brought back the science fair last year, we really had no idea how impactful it could be, not just for our students, but also for the greater community,” said Holmes. “The students were so proud of not only their investigations, but also the poster presentations they created to explain their experiments.”

All McMurray students participated in exploring, experimenting and explaining some aspect of the natural world during the fair, Holmes said — pitching their ideas to teachers, pairing up with other interested in the same topic, or flying solo on their projects.

Their resulting experiments — in timeless science fair style — were displayed on tri-fold posters using guidelines from the Washington State Science and Engineering Fair. Posters lined the halls and library of the school, where students first showed off their projects to



McMurray students (left) Sylvia Collins and Maddie Brittenham investigated the different properties that boba — also known as tapioca pearls — took on when dropped into a variety of beverages.

each other, and then to 4th and 5th grade students who rotated through McMurray on the day before the community showcase.

Touring the wall-to-wall exhibits, islanders found some projects that seemed to express a distinctly middle-school mindset.

These included Project Goldbrook, the joint effort of eighth graders Leo Cobb, Desmond Berg and Oskar Salem, who explored the effects of isolating themselves and their fellow students in a small room with the same guitar song playing on repeat at high volumes. Would their subjects become agitated by or habituated to the very loud, monotonous strumming after one hour, they wondered?

The perhaps unsurprising result? Most teens who took part in the experiment were able to tune out the ear-splitting music, they found — no problem.

Another project, by eighth-graders Jacqueline



The science fair project of (left to right) Josie Joanis, Jacqueline Dempsey, Ivy Pinckney and Lilah Densky investigated brain chemistry activated by differing types of movie genres.

Dempsey, Josie Joanis, Lilah Densky and Ivy Pinckney, gauged the often intense emotional impacts of watching various film genres including

rom-coms, horror, action and fantasy flicks on Netflix. Individual brain chemistry can explain differing tastes in movies, they found — an important consideration in considering why not all your friends might want to head out to a scary movie, for instance.

Memorable seventh grade projects included one by Mara Pederson, which tested the influence of different treats on her dog’s ability to perform tricks, and Eliza DeLapp’s project, which created new “Where’s Waldo” slides to test color association with how quickly people could find Waldo in a crowded picture.

Sixth-grader Benjo D. was all smiles as he described his project — which skated right up



Sixth-grader Benjo D., with another student who was absent on the day of the science fair community presentation, explored the effects of using differing amounts of ingredients in smoke bombs.



(Left to right) Oskar Salem, Desmond Berg, and Levi Cobb show off Project Goldbrook.



(Left to right) Nathan Provo, James Coombs, Jedrick Kozlowski and Hank Roth showed off what they learned from soaking eggs in various liquids, including sodas.

to the edge of danger by experimenting whether small differences in the amounts of potassium nitrate in a homemade smoke bomb would affect the radius of the resulting smoke. Not much, he found.

Another important lesson gleaned from the project? “I would recommend telling the fire department before you light them off so you don’t get unexpected visitors,” a panel in his poster helpfully suggested.



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